DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 697 EF 006 346

AUTHOR	Louis, Francois
TITLE	Development and Evaluation of Public Policies Aimed at Meeting Needs for Educational Facilities: Thoughts on the French Experience.
INSTITUTION	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris (France). Programme on Educational Building.
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	5p.; Paper presented at the International Seminar on Educational Infrastructure (Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, February 24-27, 2002).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00032000/M000332092.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Construction Management; *Educational Facilities; Educational Facilities Planning; Foreign Countries; *Policy Formation; *Principals; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	*France

ABSTRACT

The French experience of the last few decades provides some lessons for policymakers seeking to meet the needs for facilities at various educational levels. Two conclusions stand out: the lasting nature and impact of educational infrastructure; and (2) policy formation stands to gain from foreseeing as fully and clearly as possible the probable impact of any decisions made. Educational facilities are long-term infrastructure and the decisions to build them at a given site, in specific local conditions, will set in motion a whole set of practical and financial considerations. In France in recent years, the Ministry of National Education has been introducing a system of advance appointment of secondary school principals aimed at providing better support to local governments building new lower or upper secondary schools. Principals participate in the technical supervision of construction and do groundwork for the formation of the schools so that the architectural qualities of the facilities can be used to the optimal extent. The system does not answer all problems but it does allow architects to take into account the specific characteristics of the schools being built. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 478 697

OECD Programme on Educational Building

International Seminar on Educational Infrastructure

Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, 24 - 27 February 2002

Organised by the OECD Programme on Educational Building (PEB), the Mexican Ministry of Education and the Administrative Board of the Federal School Construction Programme (CAPFCE), Mexico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Development and evaluation of public policies aimed at meeting needs for educational facilities: thoughts on the French experience

François Louis
Administrator, Ministry of Education, France

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Edam
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Policy-makers seeking to meet the needs for facilities at the various educational levels can, in our view, learn useful lessons from the conclusions drawn from the evaluation of specific policies implemented over time, whether at the primary, secondary or higher education level. The French experience provides some relevant lessons in this regard if it is examined over the past few decades, for the following two conclusions seem to stand out:

- The lasting nature and impact of educational infrastructure: educational facilities are long-term infrastructure and the decision to build them at a given site, in specific local conditions, will set in motion a whole series of practical and financial consequences.

- For this reason policy-making in this field undoubtedly stands to gain from foreseeing as fully and clearly as possible the probable impact of any decisions made.

1) Educational infrastructure: an important issue at the local level, since the choices made will have a long-term impact, for a number of reasons

a) Educational building: an initial cost, but also a whole series of subsequent costs

The construction of educational facilities is inevitably an important issue at the local level, since local authorities and families (sometimes with the support of teachers) naturally want schools to be located in close proximity. This has a cost, and the first question raised is who is actually going to pay for this construction. The local authorities? The authorities at the level immediately above them? Or the central government, since developing education certainly lies within the scope of policy-making in the national interest? In France, the physical aspects of education (building, equipping and maintaining primary and secondary schools) are the responsibility of local and regional governments (France is divided into some 36 000 "communes" – towns or villages – 100 "*départements*" and 26 "regions"); the central government (the National Education System) is responsible for pedagogical aspects and also for the payment of

EF 006 346

Full text available at:
http://www.oecd.org/pdf/
M00032000/M00032092.pdf

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

teaching staff.[1] In higher education the central government theoretically pays both physical and staff costs, but in reality it has been implementing a policy of partnership for many years with local and regional authorities (who are directly concerned by the development of higher education), primarily the regions, which consequently provide a substantial financial contribution.

No doubt one of the most important points to be emphasised regarding educational building policy is the "ripple effect" of investment spending, since it triggers a whole series of other expenditures, such as those required to equip and maintain premises and pay day-to-day operating costs and, of course, staff costs; consequently, "educational building" is not neutral and cannot be considered in isolation. Once built, a school or higher education institution will be used for a considerable time, and if the decision to build a specific facility proves to have been ill-advised, the fact remains that government will still have to bear a heavy financial burden for some time to come.

b) Some potential rigidities that are difficult to correct subsequently

More specifically, two situations prove very difficult to manage:

- The first concerns the adaptability of premises and facilities to changes in education and possible shortcomings in the very design of schools. The introduction of new information and communication technologies and the promotion of work in small groups rather than in large classes – in order to facilitate learning, help pupils in difficulty or teach foreign languages and technological subjects – all argue in favour of building educational infrastructure that is highly adaptable to changes in curriculum and educational practice. In its publications, PEB has frequently placed special emphasis on the need for flexibility in educational infrastructure so that it can be adapted to the necessary changes over time; if the architectural and functional design of a school fails to take this dimension into account, it will be difficult, and invariably expensive, to adapt the facilities subsequently;

- The second concerns changes in the school population and the map of school locations, for there will inevitably be demographic shifts in different areas over time that will make it necessary to redeploy educational resources, in particular teaching staff. However, the French experience in this regard tends to show that local responsibility for educational building is not neutral, for the local representatives of the National Education System generally encounter the greatest difficulties when they try to redeploy resources, as this is a particularly sensitive issue both socially and politically. As a result, teacher/pupil ratios remain significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas (since every village, even if it has lost much of its population, wants to keep its "own" primary school), which raises the fundamental constitutional principle of equality. The same problem also affects small lower secondary schools ("*collèges*") with fewer than 200 pupils and to a lesser extent some small upper secondary schools ("*lycées*"). Consequently, rigidities in the map of school locations seem to be an unavoidable reality in educational policy-making.

2) "Foresight": a key word for policy-making?

How can such rigidities best be avoided? Only with difficulty, no doubt, but it does seem possible to minimise them by making a real effort to "foresee" the future in terms of educational planning, school location and architectural design suited to educational needs.

---

1. In France, the central government ultimately pays 2/3 of total education costs.

a) Planning of school infrastructure: the importance of close co-operation among all concerned

In most OECD Member countries, because of the increasing length of schooling due to social demand for education, the changes in educational tracks, particularly in technological streams, the modernisation of facilities and improved standards of quality and safety, there has been a gradual redistribution of roles in the planning and management of educational infrastructure between national, regional and local authorities and schools themselves. Three main levels of responsibility have gradually emerged, although the balance among the levels varies depending on the size and administrative traditions of the respective countries. In the planning of building and investment, this is indeed the case concerning the evaluation of enrolment capacities and new educational needs, the decision to open and close schools and the development of maintenance programmes, for even when one of the three levels seems to be predominant, the other two are generally associated in an approach of active co-operation.

In France, special care is given to organising this type of approach when implementing plans for educational investment programmes, for these programmes involve highly political issues. The choice of the location of a school or university can lead to rivalry and competition and raise a number of questions. How will the school fit into its immediate environment? Will it be used not only to meet educational needs but also other collective needs of the local population? Should a university campus be built in the centre of a city or on its outskirts? And so on. It is certain that the close co-operation between all the parties that contribute financially not only to the construction but also to the operation of schools provides a guarantee – admittedly not a perfect one, but still a real one – that the various factors to be taken into account will be effectively identified beforehand and given serious consideration; close co-operation can at least partially neutralise political influences and conflicting interests between the various partners. As regards higher education, this co-operation process mainly takes place within the negotiations held every five years at the initiative of the central government to define "planning contracts", as the various operations ultimately selected through these contracts are staggered over a five-year period.

In order to successfully carry out this process of broad-based co-operation and to consider a range of options, it is essential that decisions be based on reliable data (especially on demographic changes affecting school enrolments), as they alone can provide an objective basis for discussions that is sorely needed, since these discussions can sometimes become irrational and highly emotional.

b) The importance of the preparatory work prior to construction

Once agreement has been reached regarding a specific investment programme, in our view, "foresight" also requires recognition of the full importance of the preparatory work done before beginning the construction of a school (or university). The fact is that many key choices will be made in the architectural design phase of a specific project that will be crucial to the future and the educational effectiveness of the school: site selection (with possible consequences for the organisation of school transport), the decision to build an entirely new school or to remodel existing buildings, the basic architectural design of the project that will be adapted later, the quality of the materials used, the cabling and networking of the facilities, the organisation of a documentation centre (or a school or university library), etc. Furthermore, although aesthetic considerations should definitely be taken into account, the temptation to build "architectural showpieces" should be resisted, for resolutely modernist designs may prove to be impractical in day-to-day use. This process of involving all actors concerned – local and regional authorities (the "contracting authority"), the architect and construction companies (the "prime contractor"), local educational administrators, the personnel (especially teaching staff) and future users of the school (pupils, university students and adults with the development of life-long learning) – can make it possible to take teaching and learning requirements fully into account beforehand and to design premises that will facilitate the well-being of all concerned and provide the best possible conditions for effective

learning and student achievement through innovative educational approaches. It can also help to minimise the subsequent operating and maintenance costs, which are a financial burden that the responsible authorities will have to bear once the school has been built.

It seems useful to mention that for the past few years in France, in the field of secondary school construction, the Ministry of National Education has been introducing a system of "advance appointment" of school principals aimed at providing better support to local governments building new lower or upper secondary schools. These principals participate in the technical supervision of construction, but also do the groundwork necessary to enable them to design, implement and evaluate an education project in co-operation with all partners, especially teachers, once the school actually opens the following academic year. This project should ensure conditions that are conducive to pupils' well-being and academic achievement and that fully take advantage of the architectural qualities of the facilities. Admittedly, this system does not provide an answer to all the problems involved, but experience shows that it is valuable for enabling architects to take into account the specific characteristics of the school being built.

François Louis
Ministry of National Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").